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-3 MAY 1961

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SUBJECT : Detailed Statement of all the Circumstances Surrounding the Cancellation of the D-Day Air Strike

REFERENCE: Memorandum Entitled, Additional Information Desired of CIA, dated 1 May 1961, paragraph 1.

1. On D-1 (Sunday, 16 April 1961) at 2130 hours General Cabell was telephoned by Special Assistant to the President McGeorge Bundy. General Cabell received this call in Mr. Esterline's office. On completion of the call, General Cabell indicated that Mr. Bundy had stated it had been decided that there be no air activity until such activity could be conducted from the air strip in the beach area. Mr. Bundy had indicated that he had been in communication with the President. Mr. Bundy was leaving for New York to consult with Ambassador Stevenson. The President had directed that the Agency consult the Secretary of State.

2. General Cabell called Mr. Bissell. It was indicated that Mr. Bundy had also called Mr. Bissell. Mr. Bissell undertook to come immediately to Mr. Esterline's office.

3. At 2150 Mr. Barnes telephoned Mr. Esterline's office to say that Secretary Rusk had called to say that the President had suggested that there be no air activity until such activity could be conducted from the air strip in the beach area, but that that should not be the case if there were operational reasons against it.

4. Shortly after ten o'clock, General Cabell and Mr. Bissell went to see the Secretary of State. Shortly after General Cabell and Mr. Bissell left, Colonel Hawkins returned from dinner and was briefed by Mr. Esterline as to the above developments. Colonel Hawkins telephoned Mr. Bissell at Secretary Rusk's conference and advised that the results of a cancellation of the air strike could be disastrous. Colonel Hawkins requested that the matter be taken up again with the President in order to explain the seriousness of the situation and to request consideration.

5. When General Cabell and Mr. Bissell returned at approximately 2315, General Cabell stated that there had been a change in our orders and that air support would be limited to close support of the beachhead. They reported they had not seen the President, but that Secretary Rusk had telephoned the President and recommended there be no air strike, in view of political considerations.

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6. Colonel Hawkins, Mr. Esterline and Mr. Drain all pointed out that this change came too late to divert the strike force; our most recent information indicated that, according to the strike plan, at that very moment the force was transferring to the smaller craft and proceeding towards the beach and therefore could not be recalled. The task force officers estimated that the failure to strike the aircraft, which Zip reports and actual photography had shown in place after the D-2 air strike, would be that our shipping would be attacked at dawn, or shortly thereafter, with a result that supplies would not be landed and some of the ships certainly sunk. It was put that the cancellation of the D-Day strike would probably mean failure of the mission. General Cabell replied that we had our "marching orders" and would comply.

7. General Cabell requested that Colonel Beerli, the Acting Chief of the Air Division, be called to send to the Puerto Cabezas air base a revised air order. Such a revision was transmitted at 0158 on 17 April and said, in part:

"Complete plan amended to place all B-26 aircraft at disposal of Brigade commander for Task Force protection: targets outlined in OPS Plan 200-1, attachment 1, appendix 2 to Annex B are cancelled... target restrictions are as follows: (1) only those armed vessels approaching task force or landing area; (2) no seaports to be attacked; (3) only those land targets that are called for by Brigade Commander for close in support; (4) no large cargo ships."

8. A message received from the Puerto Cabezas Air Base at 0645 on the 17th indicated that the above message was received at that base 17 minutes after transmission. The Base's reply read, in part:

"Refs received and reluctantly complied with. Complete plan amendment per refs received 170715Z with all pilots in cockpit ready for start engines. Needless to say this less than desirable operating procedure when 12 aircraft timed for take-off between 0730Z and 0800Z. Realize it desired give maximum protection to Brigade however believe change will not afford as much protection as original strike plan. The only real offensive danger to the Brigade is enemy fighters and bombers which are better hit on their home field--not repeat not over the beachhead... Pilots were in continual briefings today without sleep prior strike as a result late guidance and last minute changes."

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9. At approximately 0015 of the 17th, General Cabell telephoned Major General Gray at the latter's home and requested that General Gray join General Cabell and Project officers in Mr. Esterline's office. General Gray arrived at 0100. General Cabell informed General Gray as to the cancellation of the strategic strikes on the airfields and on the Managua Military Reservation and explored with General Gray what the JCS might do to compensate for this limitation. General Gray left at approximately 0145 to consult with JCS personnel. TS cable JCS 99422 was subsequently transmitted by General Gray to Admiral Clark and Admiral Denison. That cable, a warning order, indicated that the CEF aircraft would be limited on 17 April to defense of the beachhead from air and ground attack and that limited Cuban aircraft patrol activity was expected in the area. It also stated that the recipients should be prepared to execute on order the following missions "as soon after first light as practicable throughout daylight hours 17 April:

" a. Provide Air Cap for CEF shipping outside territorial waters. Rules of engagement as stated in your Op Plan apply as applicable.

" b. Provide EW for CEF ships to include LCI's for purpose of warning ships of approaching aircraft. EW ships should remain maximum distance off shore consistent with capability to communicate with CEF ships."

10. At 0525 Mr. Bissell called Colonel Shuler of the JCS Staff to advise him to implement General Gray's warning order immediately, with the following amendments: paragraph a, negative; paragraph b, affirmative, with two provisos: (1) no support to be closer than 30 miles to the coast of Cuba, and (2) ships not to be too close to one another. Mr. Bissell had earlier received this advice in a telephone conversation with General Cabell and the Secretary of State.

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